

SITE SURVEY REPORT  
ALASKA COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM (SEATTLE)  
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

This report summarizes historical information collected, a site visit, and contacts made during an investigation of the former Alaska Communications System (Seattle) site. The investigation was carried out under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program for Formerly Used Defense Sites by Shapiro and Associates, Inc., under contract to the Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Site Location and Historical Overview

The Alaska Communications System's West Seattle Transmitter Station site was established in 1941 on 36.86 acres of land at 21st Avenue Southwest and West Genesee Street in Seattle, King County, Washington. An adjoining area of 7.52 acres was acquired in 1945 for a total of 44.38 acres. An additional 4.97 acres were acquired under leasehold condemnation on May 22, 1945, but the lease terminated soon after, on June 30, 1945. The 44.38 acres were initially leased, then acquired through condemnation. The site was used by the Army Signal Corps as a transmitting station for the Alaska Communication System, which served the Territory of Alaska. Realty records indicate that a total of 14 buildings were on the site at the time of disposal. Buildings included living quarters, numerous tuning huts and an underground transmitter building. Records are contradictory as to whether the house, duplex and garage were on the site at the time of acquisition; one says all improvements were removed at the time of acquisition, another says the house, duplex and garage were on the site when it was acquired. After acquisition, an underground concrete transmitter building was constructed and an antenna system consisting of numerous antennae, poles, masts and tuning huts was placed on the grounds.

The 44.38 acres were reported excess in 1958 and conveyed by Quitclaim Deed to the University of Washington. The University used the site as a research facility and built a large electric field consisting of poles and wires. By 1975, use of the site was minimal and in 1979 the University removed the poles, leaving the wires to be removed later by the caretaker. Until about 1982, the underground building was used by the University as a dog kennel and as a laboratory for performing experiments on dogs. The site is currently unused by the University and is maintained by a caretaker who lives in the house on the site.

Information Gathered Through Telephone and Personal Interviews

The following is an annotated version of telephone and personal interviews conducted during an investigation of the Alaska Communications System (Seattle) site.

King County Office of Assessments  
Public Information System (self-help)  
King County Administration Building  
Seattle, WA 98104

Using this computer system we were able to determine the current owners of the site. The University of Washington owns the majority of the site; the City of Seattle owns a small piece at the southern edge of the site where the Puget Park boundary curves to the north along the line that was Puget Boulevard.

Mr. Neil Lessinger  
University of Washington Real Estate Office  
Seattle, WA 98195  
(206) 543-0054

Mr. Lessinger confirmed that the site is owned by the University of Washington. Several buildings and one underground structure remain on the site, which is now called the West Seattle Laboratory. The only building in use is the one the caretaker lives in. The radio towers are no longer on the site.

Mr. John McNamara  
Caretaker, West Seattle Laboratory  
(206) 685-1574

Mr. McNamara became acquainted with the property when he began mowing its lawn in 1975. He became the live-in caretaker in 1980 and now lives in the house on the site. Neighbors who were present during the time of military use have told him it was the commanding officer's house. Mr. McNamara provided much of the information contained in the site visit report.

### Site Visit

On November 16, 1990, Kristen Nielsen of Shapiro and Associates, Inc., under contract to the Seattle District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, conducted a site visit. John McNamara, the current caretaker of the site, acted as a guide and provided historical information. Access to the site is via a driveway near the corner of 19th and Genesee. The site is surrounded by a high cyclone fence topped with barbed wire and the gate is kept locked. At the end of the driveway are the buildings described in the real estate records: the house, the duplex and the five-car garage. Also visible from the driveway are the entrances to the underground building. The tuning huts, small wood frame buildings, are scattered across the property. There is a trailer-like unit near the duplex that contains what appears to be telegraph equipment. This structure is not mentioned in the real estate records; Mr. McNamara does not know its origin.

The underground building is approximately 7,100 square feet. It has two entrances, both kept locked, and three visible vent pipes. Neighbors who saw it being built say its concrete roof is eight to twelve feet thick. The structure is no longer used, but pumps are kept going to prevent it from filling with water.

While the laboratory was active, the University used the house and duplex for student and faculty housing. Later the duplex was used for storage. Underground oil tanks were installed by the University to heat the dwellings. The records do not state how the dwellings were heated prior to this; portable tanks may have been used.

The small portion of the site now owned by the City of Seattle is an undeveloped wooded area. There is no visible evidence of DOD use on this portion of the site.

### Summary

Real estate records indicate that the subject property was used by the Army for the West Seattle Transmitter Station link in the Alaska Communications System. Structures dating from this use remain on the site, including a number of tuning huts and an underground building. The University of Washington has owned the site since DOD relinquished control, and used it as a laboratory facility until the mid 1970s. Because the entire site has been beneficially used, and because the buildings are in good condition, the site does not appear to be eligible for remedial work under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program.

DEFENSE ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION PROGRAM  
FOR  
FORMERLY USED DEFENSE SITES  
PERSONS CONTACTED  
ALASKA COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM (SEATTLE)  
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON  
PROJECT NO. F10WA024100

King County Office of Assessments  
Public Information System (self-help)  
King County Administration Building  
Seattle, WA 98104  
October 26, 1990

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Real Estate Office  
University of Washington  
Seattle, WA 98195  
(206) 543-0054  
November 8, 1990

Mr. John McNamara  
Caretaker, West Seattle Laboratory  
(206) 685-1574  
November 9 and 19, 1990

\* Recipient of Letter of Finding